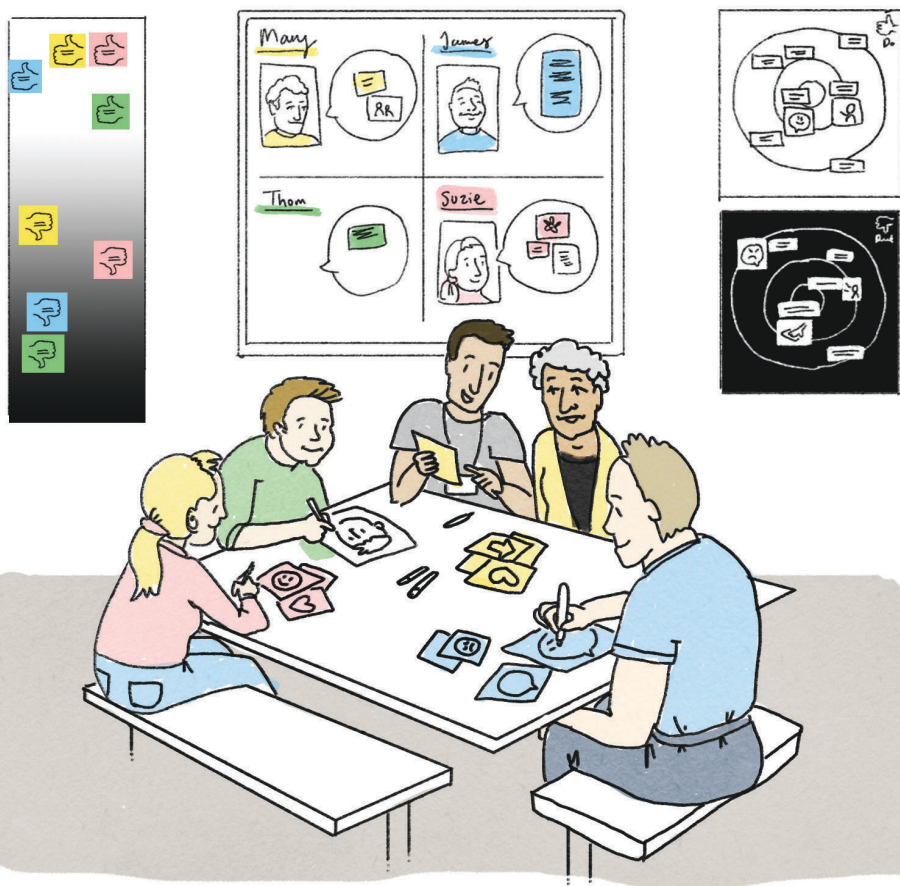# Sharing and decision-making

Visual communication toolkit for people with learning disabilities

Background

This visual communication toolkit is the product of a collaboration between Cardiff University and two leading Welsh charities that provide support and advocacy for adults with learning disabilities.

Its aim is to help people with learning disabilities express emotions and preferences, share news, and take part in community decisions. It can be used both individually and in groups of people with limited verbal skills.

Project team
Dr. Elisabeth (Lisa) El Refaie, School of English, Communication and Philosophy, Cardiff University
Dr. Michelle Aldridge-Waddon, School of English, Communication and Philosophy, Cardiff University
Laura Sorvala, illustrator and graphic recorder (www.auralab.co.uk)

In partnership with
Mirus and Innovate Trust

Funded by
The Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Account

Activities
The project team went to several of Innovate Trust's monthly consultation events for members, focussing on helping people with limited verbal skills to discuss issues to do with supported living. They also ran three workshops in a new, purpose-built housing development run by Mirus. They demonstrated how to use the toolkit to express emotions and preferences, share personal interests and news, make decisions, and discuss community rules.

Free downloads
Please visit **www.cardiff.ac.uk/visual-communication-aids** for further ideas and information, including free downloads of all the materials presented in this booklet (written in **BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS** below).

Contents

A DAY OUT — WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE?
FOR DLC

London   FARM   OAKWOOD   ZOO

LONDON   FARM   OAKWOOD

TASH   JON

CLEANING

Do 👍

Help to clean up
Always tidy up after yourself
Share the TV
Always listen to staff
Always be polite
Give people space
When staff ask you to leave, please leave the room

Don't 👎

No throwing furniture
No parking
No shouting
No swearing
No breaking things
Don't touch other people's belongings

Introducing the toolkit

The aim
To provide visual communication aids for people with learning disabilities to express emotions and preferences, and to participate effectively in community decision-making.

The underpinning research
This project combines El Refaie's research on visual metaphor, Aldridge-Waddon's expertise in supporting individuals with communication disorders, and Sorvala's experience as a visual facilitator.

The gap in provision with existing visual communication aids
Existing visual aids are often based on conventional systems that must be learned; for example, green-amber-red for good-neutral-bad. They are also typically designed for individuals rather than groups.

The advantages of this new toolkit
- This new toolkit is based on bodily experiences we all naturally use to express feelings or ideas. For example, because of the experience of gravity, we typically associate 'up' with happy/good and 'down' with sad/bad. Similarly, large size stands for more importance.
- For this reason, the materials can be understood easily by everyone, including people with limited verbal skills.
- If the activities in the toolkit are regularly used by a group, they become a shared language that everyone can learn to use and understand.

General principles:
- Everybody chooses a card colour, which is their colour for all activities.
- For people with colour-blindness, their name or initials should be written on the cards, or a small photo of them can be glued in the middle of the cards. For people with no vision, thicker cards should be used, so people can feel the shapes.
- Have blank sheets of paper ready in case anyone wants to draw during the activities.

The materials
The materials described in this booklet (written in **BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS** below) are available as free downloads from **www.cardiff.ac.uk/visual-communication-aids**

Expressing preferences
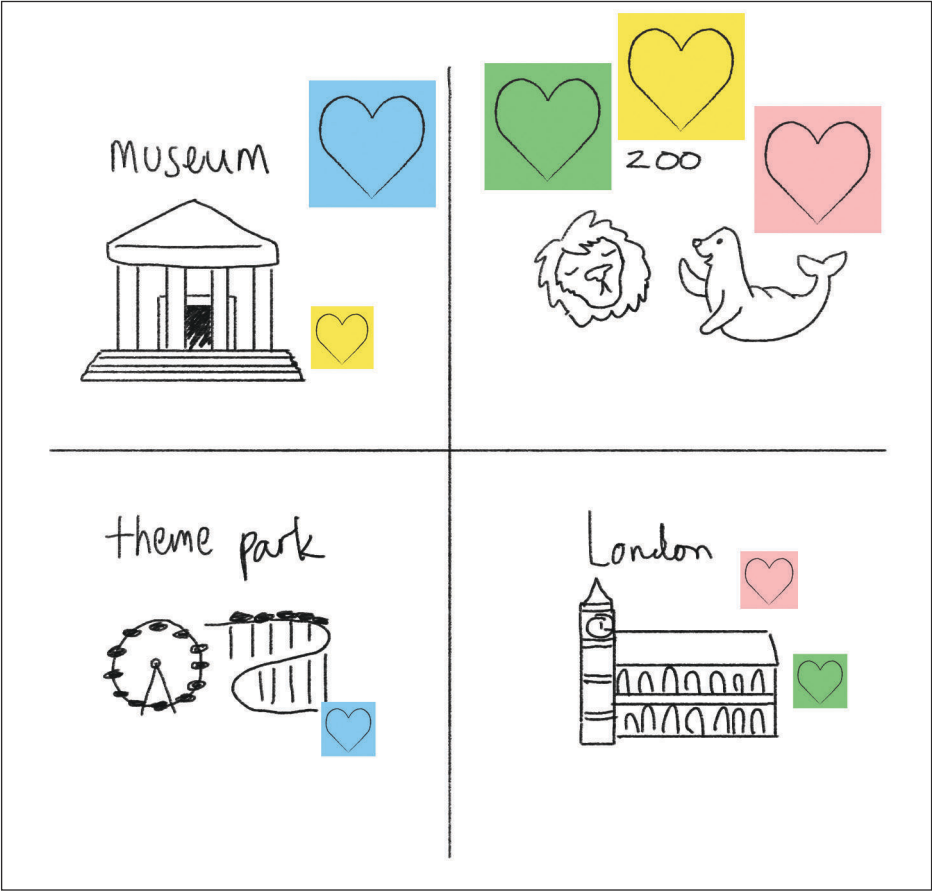
Materials needed
• Wall space / board / table
• Blue/white tack, pens
• Photos or drawings of options
• **LARGE HEARTS** and **SMALL HEARTS**
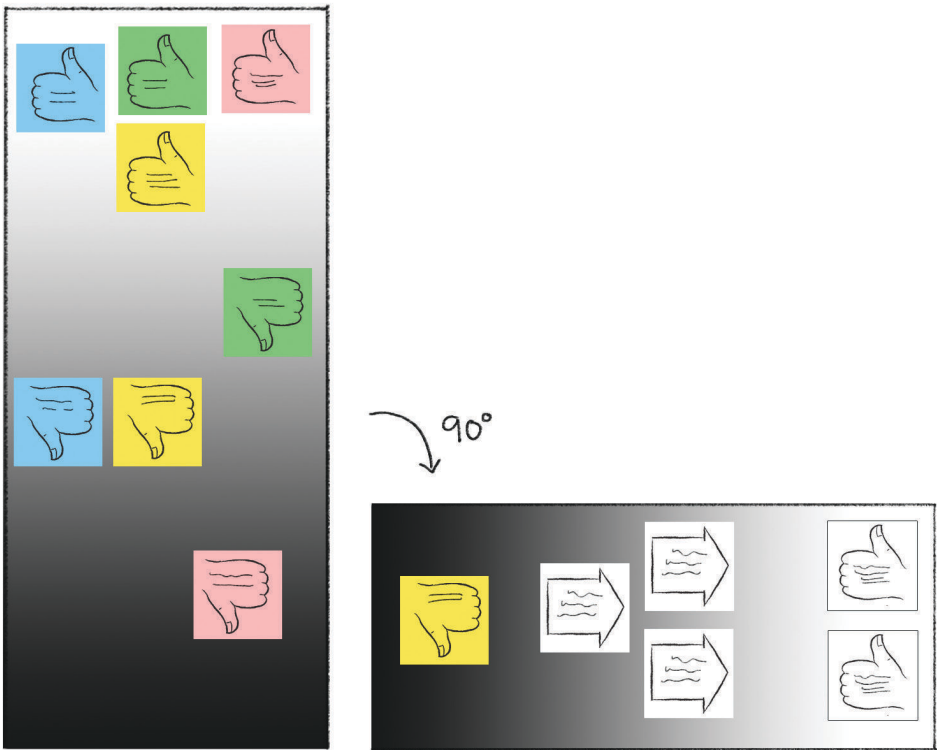 (printed in members' colours)

Expressing preferences – guidelines:

The aim
This activity helps individuals and/or group members show which of several options they prefer (e.g., where to go on holiday, or how to spend some money), by using large or small heart shapes. It also gives a visual record of the results.
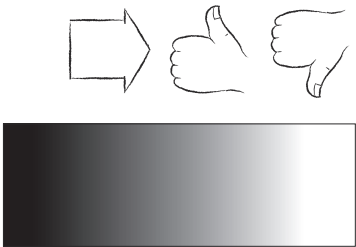
Guidelines
1. Each option (e.g., where to go for a holiday or daytrip, how to spend some money, planning a programme of activities…) is represented through a photograph or drawing.
2. All the drawings/photographs are spread out on a table or wall/board.
3. Everyone is given or chooses a **LARGE HEART** and a **SMALL HEART** card in their colour.
4a. Everyone places the large heart (in their colour) on their favourite option and the small heart on their second-favourite option.

or

4b. Everyone can just have one 'vote' and place one heart (in their colour) on their favourite option.
5. The option with the most hearts is the winner (a large heart is 'worth' two small ones).
6. If two options have the same number of hearts (a draw), the least popular option(s) should be taken away and everyone should place their hearts again.
7. The winning option can be put up on a board or wall, or recorded in a photograph (e.g. to be included in the minutes of a meeting).

Expressing positives/negatives

90°

Materials needed
- Wall space
- Blue/white tack, pens
- **GRADIENT** poster
- **THUMBS** (printed in members' colours)
- **ARROWS** (printed in white only)

Expressing positives/negatives – guidelines:

The aim
This activity gives everyone the opportunity to express positives/negatives (e.g. what is good or bad about living in a community), by putting thumbs up-down cards on a white to black gradient poster. It also gives a visual record of the results.
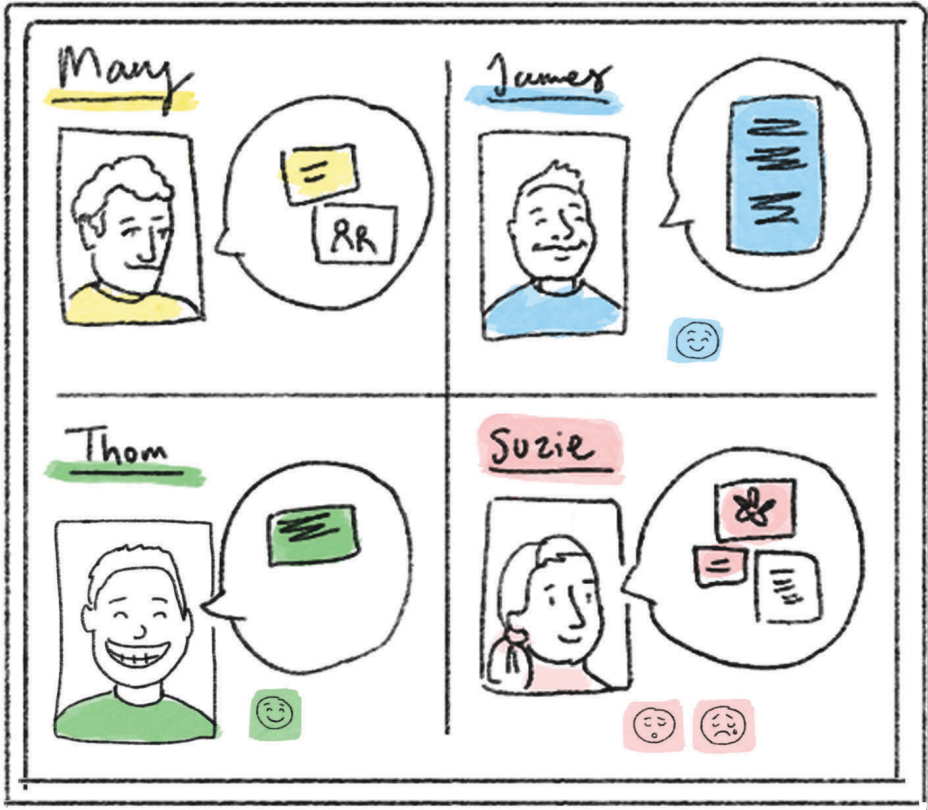
Guidelines
1. Put the **GRADIENT** white-black poster on a wall or board. White should be at the top.
2. Teach everyone that white/up is good and down/black is bad.
3. Give everyone 2-4 **THUMBS** cards in their colour. Everyone says something good (positive) about the topic and writes it (with help) on a **THUMBS** up card.
4. Everyone says something bad (negative) about the topic and writes it (with help) on a **THUMBS** down card (turn thumb card upside down).
5. Everyone puts their thumb cards on the gradient poster to show how good/bad (positive/negative) they feel about the topic (so, very good is put at the top, very bad is put at the bottom, a little bit good/bad somewhere in the middle).
6. People with no verbal ability show if something is good or bad overall by placing their blank up/down **THUMBS** cards in the white-black part of the poster.
7. The poster can be left on a wall for everyone to see or a photograph taken of the poster.

Group discussion
In a more able group, the gradient poster can help a discussion about how to solve a problem:
1. Put the **GRADIENT** poster sideways on the wall so the black section is on the left and the white section is on the right.
2. Choose one of the bad **THUMBS** down cards that describes a problem and place it on the black section (on the left).
3. Use **THUMBS** up cards to write what a good solution/outcome would be for this problem and place the cards on the white section.
4. Use **ARROWS** cards to write ways to get from the problem to the solution and place them in the middle.
5. This can be repeated until all the problems have been discussed.

Sharing news

Materials needed
- Wall space / board
- Blue/white tack, pens
- Photos or drawings of people, names
- **LARGE SPEECH BALLOONS** (printed in white)
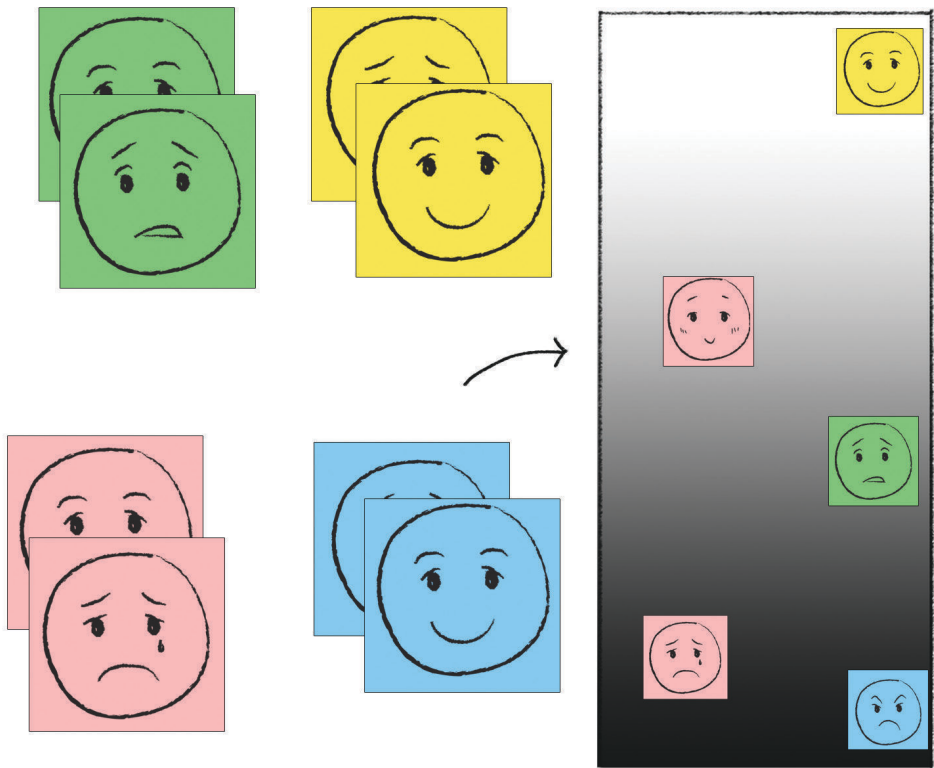- **EMOTIONS** (printed in members' colours; optional)
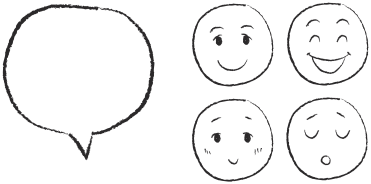
Sharing news – guidelines:

The aim
This activity gives everyone a place in their home (or day centre, work place) to share their news and how they are feeling.

Guidelines
1. A photo or drawing of everyone with their name should be placed on a wall or white/pin-board (use member's individual colours for drawings and/or name).
2. Draw a large speech balloon, or put one or more **LARGE SPEECH BALLOONS** cards next to each photo/picture.
3. Everyone writes, draws, or glues a picture of something they want other people to know about (e.g., an achievement, a hobby they enjoy, a special person they have met, news about a family member) in the speech balloons.
4. **EMOTIONS** cards can be put by the pictures if people want to share their feelings. These can be updated weekly or daily, perhaps as part of a regular activity (see 'Expressing emotions' activity).

Expressing emotions

Materials needed
- Wall space / board / table
- Blue/white tack, pens
- **GRADIENT** poster

- **BASIC EMOTIONS**........................
(printed in members' colours)

- **COMPLEX EMOTIONS**...............
(printed in members' colours; optional)

- **CIRCLES** in different sizes (printed in members' colours; optional)

Expressing emotions – guidelines:

The aim
This activity gives everyone the opportunity to share how they are feeling.

Guidelines
1. Put the **BASIC EMOTIONS** and/or **COMPLEX EMOTIONS** cards on a table. Ask people to find the facial expression that represents 'happy' and 'sad', and then go on to the more complex emotions ('upset', 'worried').
2. Put the **GRADIENT** white-black poster on a wall or board. White should be at the top.
3. The poster can be used to help decide how positive or negative a particular emotion is (towards white = more positive, towards black = more negative).
4. Ask everyone to either choose the emotion card that best shows their emotional state (how they are feeling), or to draw a face (using the **CIRCLES** cards) in their own colour.
5. The emotion cards can then be put on the **GRADIENT** poster or on each individual's news space (see 'Sharing news') to provide a community 'mood board'. This activity might become part of a daily or weekly routine, or else a way to start meetings, for example.

Agreeing on dos and don'ts
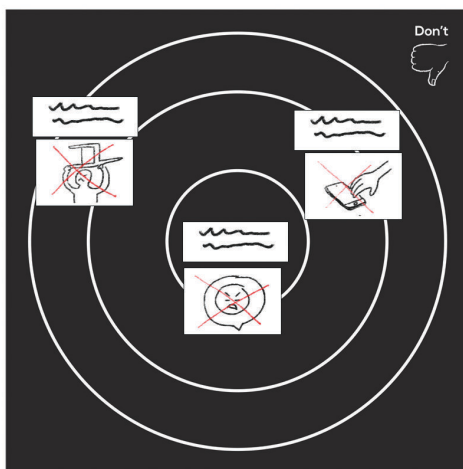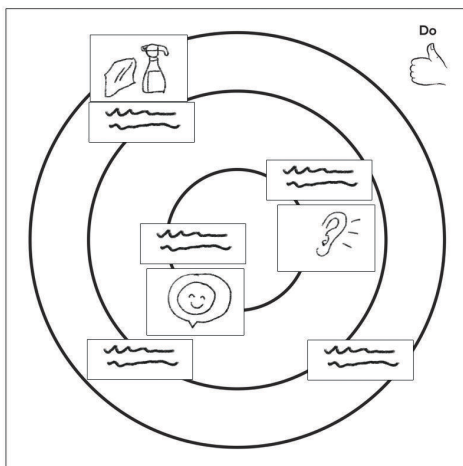
Materials needed
- Wall space / board
- Blue/white tack, pens
- Existing rules (if available),
  with each rule written on a separate card
- **DO** poster
- **DON'T** poster
- **SMALL SPEECH BALLOONS** (printed in members' colours)
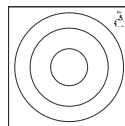
Agreeing on dos and don'ts

The aim
This activity gives everyone the opportunity to discuss how to live or work well together and to decide on the most important dos and don'ts. The results can be recorded visually and put in a prominent place.

Guidelines
1. Put the **DO** and **DON'T** posters up on the wall, with the **DO** poster above the **DON'T** one. Explain that white is 'what you should do' and black is 'what you shouldn't do'.
2a. If the community has rules, print or write each rule on a separate card. Give each person a set of these cards in their colour and ask them to sort the cards into dos and don'ts. Put some examples on the appropriate poster to check understanding.

or

2b. If there are no existing community rules, give everyone **SMALL SPEECH BALLOONS** cards in their colour. Ask them to write down (with help) some dos and some don'ts. Some examples can be placed on the appropriate poster to check understanding.
3. Explain that the most important rule goes in the middle, and the least important rule goes in the outer ring.
4. Give everyone a set of the dos in their colour and ask them to place their cards in the appropriate ring on the poster.
5. Give everyone a set of the don'ts in their colour and ask them to place their cards in the appropriate ring on the poster.
6. Use the **SMALL SPEECH BALLOONS** cards to add further dos or don'ts to the respective posters (white or black) (optional activity).
7. Add up the cards in the middle and the outer rings and count which are the most and the less important rules.
8. Remove all the coloured cards and replace them with one set of white cards with the rules written on them. Arrange them on the posters from most to least important (middle to outer rings).
9. Make simple drawings or photos (or use e.g. Photosymbol) to show some of the main rules visually.
10. The posters should be put on a communal wall, or recorded in a photograph.

List of all materials

Make sure to have pens, blue/white tack (if using posters on a wall) and enough symbol cards in different colours, one for each participant. You can have blank sheets of paper ready for some of the activities in case participants want to draw things themselves.

All materials in **BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS** can be downloaded from the website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/visual-communication-aids

Symbols cards
The symbols cards can be used in different activities and printed on A4 sheets of white or coloured paper as required.

BASIC EMOTIONS

| Happy | Sad | Angry | Afraid | Surprised | Excited |

COMPLEX EMOTIONS

| Thoughtful /Doubtful | Annoyed | Confused /Sick | Shy | Embarrassed | Tired |

HEARTS, ARROWS, THUMBS UP/DOWN, SPEECH BALLOONS, CIRCLES
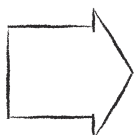
Large Format Posters

If you can, use a local printing company to print these large format posters. These can be printed, trimmed to size and laminated. The lamination helps protect the paper and make the poster last longer in use.
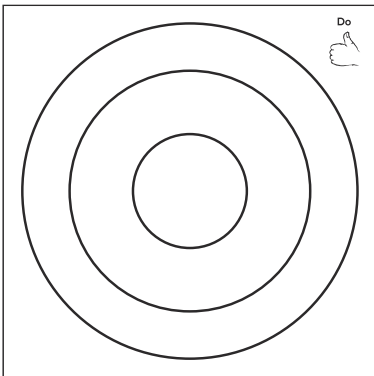
GRADIENT poster
- 1 x A0 pdf file printed in colour (will give a deeper black colour)
- cut in half lengthways (roughly 420mm by 1189mm)
- Laminated as two separate pieces

DOS AND DONT'S posters
- 2 x A1 pdf files printed in colour (will give a deeper black colour)
- trimmed to squares off an A1 (594mm x 594mm)
- both pieces then laminated

Acknowledgements

Feedback and license

We would be extremely grateful for your feedback, either via the website **www.cardiff.ac.uk/visual-communication-aids**, or by emailing Lisa El Refaie: **RefaieEE@cardiff.ac.uk**. Please let us know if you have used any of the materials presented in this booklet, and how useful they were to you and your organisation. We would also like to know if there are any other visual aids you would find useful.